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STATE OF MONTANA
PLEASI
DIVISION OF FORENSIC SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
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SEPTEMBER 1982

DIVISION DOLLARS FOR MONTANA

The serology section of the Division of Forensic Science was awarded a federal grant to improve the criminal investigation of rape throughout the state. This was mainly through the efforts of our section head, Ken Konzak.

The toxicology section was also approved federal funds to purchase four more Alco-analyzers. These breath testing machines were distributed to cities with the highest records of DWI arrests. This increases our total to twenty-two state owned breath testing machines scattered throughout Montana. Laboratory Director Arnold Melnikoff was primarily responsible for obtaining this grant.

Through the efforts of the State Medical Examiner and the Missoula County Sheriffs Office a county morgue was funded by the commissioners. Nearing completion, the morgue will serve the entire area west of the divide. It has the largest walk-in cooler in the state, two autopsy stations and a modern body scale with digital read outs in pounds and kilograms.

MECAP HOTLINE

Coroners are urged to report consumer product-involved deaths to the Medical Examiners and Coroners Alert Project in Washington D.C. The phone number is 800/638-8095. You can also request free information regarding product related deaths by their monthly newsletter. A recent death in Montana from a playpen whose sides were not fully extended was reported. Information was obtained that similar deaths had occurred recently and the manufacturer was notified. In this manner needless deaths will be prevented.

MANDATORY TRAINING FOR CORONERS

The Montana Coroners Association is preparing a bill to require death investigation courses for coroners. As your State Medical Examiner I wholeheartedly approve the legislation and encourage your support. Such a bill will enable all of the coroners to improve and update their capabilities in assisting law enforcement and county attorneys.

ON CALL SCHEDULE - MONTANA STATE MEDICAL EXAMINER

SEPTEMBER 1982

275 W. Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4 KEN MUELLER
5 KEN MUELLER	6 KEN MUELLER	7	8	9	10	11 RON RIVERS
12 RON RIVERS	13	14	15	16	17	18 JOHN PHAFF
19 JOHN PFAFF	20	21	22	23	24	25 RON RIVERS
26 RON RIVERS	27	28	29	30		

Telephone Numbers: State Office - 728-4970
WATS Line - 243-5796

Home Phone: Dr. Ron Rivers- 728-2033 (Home)
(week nights call unless otherwise indicated)

Dr. John Pfaff - Great Falls
Hospital - 727-3333
Home - 727-3905

Dr. Ken Mueller- Billings
Hospital - 657-7000
Home - 248-3024

SEPTEMBER 1982
ARSON DEATHS
R. L. RIVERS, M.D.

Kneeling over the charred remains of two barely distinguishable bodies, the firefighter commented, "The vapor detector indicates some kind of accelerant was used". "Yep", the chief said, "make sure you put the samples for the crime lab in the right kind of container".

"How about these bodies, coroner? They are burned beyond recognition and one doesn't have any head or hands to identify them by. This one body has a fractured skull. I think they were both murdered and then set on fire." "That's a possibility, Mayor, but we better get Quincy to examine them", the coroner answered. "Well, who is Quincy?", the mayor asked. "He's Montana's Associate Medical Examiner, a pathologist appointed by the Division of Forensic Science to help our community in death investigations.", the coroner beamed. "We got one right in town to help us, and I know he is going to want X-rays so we better get busy." "X-rays!", the mayor exclaimed, "That'll cost us an arm and a leg. What's he want them for?" "You'll see", the coroner said, "Let's get going."

QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED:

1) What type of container is needed for arson samples?

2) How can charred bodies without a head or hands be positively identified?

3) Does the fractured skull indicate blunt force trauma?

4) Does the absence of the head and hands indicate an attempt to disguise the identity of the victim?

5) How many associate medical examiners are in Montana?

6) What can the X-rays tell?

7) Can toxicology samples be taken?

SEPTEMBER 1982
ARSON DEATHS
R. L. RIVERS, M.D.

ANSWERS:

1. To prevent evaporation of a sample it must be placed into a new metal paint can or a new canning jar. The cans are available at paint stores or auto part stores. Control samples must be taken also. Make sure the lids are on tight and sealed and labelled. Plastic bags or plastic jars are unsatisfactory.

2. If the fingerprints and teeth are gone the best remaining means for positive identification is comparing an antemortem X-ray with a postmortem X-ray. An X-ray taken during life of a chest or any bone or fracture can be matched with the same bone X-rayed at autopsy. A forensic radiologist can then testify as to the identity of the victim. I was involved in one case where the match was made on the basis of the twists in the wire sutures of a previously broken jaw.

3. Frequently the intense heat of a fire will literally boil the contents of a skull and cause it to explode. The bony fragments may project outward rather than inward such as caused by blunt force trauma.

4. Completely charred victims often have their hands and feet cremated beyond recognition. Depending on the intensity and the length of the fire the head, arms and legs may also incinerate.

5. There are nearly thirty associate medical examiners scattered throughout the State of Montana.

6. Besides revealing the identity as previously explained, X-rays can show bullets, knife points or fractures that would indicate foul play.

7. Yes. Although the body may be burned to a crisp on the outside there is always some fluid or organs deep in the body that are satisfactory for testing. Even the marrow in the bones can be analyzed. Often some vitreous may be available. Dried clotted blood can be tested for some drugs.